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ABSTRACT

This study identified preservice teachers' knowledge about effective and ineffective classroom management strategies for defiant behavior. Data in the form of extended written responses were obtained from student teachers in a rural, southern teacher education program at the end of their student teaching experience in the spring semester. Participants were asked to generate classroom management strategies in response to hypothetical problems that occurred in the classroom, discussing strategies they would use in handling two hypothetical vignettes of defiant behavior and specific strategies that might not work. Data analysis indicated that student teachers' reported strategies for both vignettes were more similar than different. They most frequently reported that they would send the student to the office, give verbal directives to stop the behavior, lecture or reprimand, talk to both students separately, and involve the principal or parents. Strategies they typically considered ineffective included yelling or screaming at the students or threatening punishment. What was absent from the student teachers' responses were proactive measures to prevent such behavior or attempts to socialize the students to cooperate with learning goals. (SM)

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Preservice Teachers' Knowledge of Effective Classroom Management Strategies: Defiant Behavior

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Preservice Teachers' Knowledge of Effective Classroom Management Strategies: Defiant Behavior

Perspective

One of the biggest concerns of beginning teachers is the lack of preparation they received in classroom management. The topic of classroom management is usually addressed as a small part of Educational Psychology or peripherally as part of discipline techniques in Child Development courses. As students enter their student teaching experience, they often arrive in the classroom with brief coverage of a variety of different approaches to classroom management. They are "likely to find such instruction ineffective or even counterproductive" (Brophy, 1987, p. 34). These students enter teacher preparation programs "not merely lacking knowledge about effective classroom management but also harboring mistaken attitudes and beliefs (misconceptions) that are likely to persist unless directly confronted and refuted" (Brophy, 1987, p. 28). Teachers who feel unprepared for the classroom are likely to drop out of the teaching profession.

The present study was initiated in response to feedback received from graduates of our undergraduate teacher preparation program at the university. Systematic program evaluation efforts by our College of Education have revealed that student teachers and beginning teachers feel least prepared and confident in dealing with issues related to classroom management. Feedback from local school districts and other concerned citizenry also indicated that teachers felt unprepared to cope with problem students who frustrated teachers' attempts to teach.

Objectives

The present study was developed to identify preservice teachers' knowledge about

effective and ineffective classroom management strategies for defiant behavior. Identification of preservice teachers' knowledge about classroom management practices is considered a prerequisite to developing a coherent curriculum that addresses issues related to classroom management.

Method and Data Source

Student teachers of the undergraduate teacher preparation program at a southern rural public university were asked to generate classroom management strategies in response to hypothetical problems that occurred in the classroom. Data in the form of extended written responses were obtained from student teachers at the end of their student teaching experience in the spring semester. The teacher preparation program at this university is tightly sequenced with each education course serving as a prerequisite for the following course. Students first enroll in Foundations of Education followed by Educational Psychology, Child Development, Instructional Design, Methods, and finally Student Teaching.

At the end of the spring semester, student teachers that represented the entire graduating class were given a written assignment in a group setting. Of the 82 student teacher responses, 79 were considered usable. The sample included 63 females and 16 males. The majority of the respondents were Caucasian.

The students were to discuss strategies they would use in dealing with two hypothetical vignettes depicting defiant behavior and also discuss specific strategies that may not work (Appendix A). These were a subset of the vignettes used by Brophy and McCaslin (1992). The vignettes were attached to the cover sheet in a randomized order.

The researchers in class collected students' completed responses. A research assistant

trained in the coding system coded the extended responses. The coding system incorporated a subset of the categories represented in the universal coding system for vignettes (Brophy & McCaslin, 1992).

Results

The student teachers' reported strategies for both vignettes were more similar than different. Student teachers most frequently reported that they would send the student to the office, give verbal directives to stop behavior, lecture or reprimand, talk to both students separately and involve the principal or parents.

The strategies that were typically considered ineffective included yelling or screaming at the boys or threatening punishment. What seemed clearly absent from student teachers' responses were proactive measures to prevent such behavior or attempts to socialize the students to cooperate with learning goals in the classroom.

Discussion and Educational Importance

According to Brophy and McCaslin's (1992) findings, teachers, in response to defiant behavior, tend to respond with rejection or focus on control and punishment. Defiant behavior is perceived as being disruptive or threatening to the teacher's authority. This would often lead to teacher frustration, irritation or anger. Thus strategies focusing on rejection or control seem to predominate.

The results of this study indicate that preservice teachers, in response to defiant behavior, would not use verbal control or involve higher authorities in the disciplinary process. Brophy and Alleman (1998) pointed out "that most successful classroom teachers focus on establishing effective learning environments rather then functioning primarily as disciplinarians" (p. 57). The

responses of the preservice teachers in this study resemble those of the low-rated teachers in Brophy and Rohrkemper's (1987) study. These low-rated teachers had "limited and vague ideas about how to respond to defiant students . . . . most would involve the principal or other professionals at the school because they saw themselves as lacking ability, training, or clear ideas about what to do beyond scolding, threatening or applying punishment, or informing the parents" (p. 53). Instead of taking a proactive approach to classroom management, they wait for problems to happen.

Our data seem to suggest that preservice teachers may not have developed a well-articulated system for dealing with problem students thus may not employ strategies that were systematic enough to produce enduring effects. "Good classroom management implies more than eliciting student cooperation in maintaining order" (Brophy & Alleman, 1998, p. 56). As Brophy (1987) suggests the instruction that preservice teachers receive in classroom management will need to be "integrated and systematic" so that they can view "classroom management within a context-goals-strategies-repairs framework that will provide coherence to their planning and implementation of management strategies" (p. 35). Only then will preservice teachers be able to assert themselves in the classroom.

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Appendix A

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Directions: Given on the following page are two descriptions of problem students that teachers often identify as time consuming, frustrating, and/or worrisome to teach. For each problem student described, discuss in as much detail as possible:

a. Specific strategies you would use in dealing with this type of student.

b. Specific strategies that may NOT work with this type of student.

SCENARIO 1:
Squirt guns are not permitted in school. Scott has been squirting other students with his squirt gun. You tell him to bring the squirt gun to you. He refuses, saying that it is his and you have no right to it. You insist, but he remains defiant and starts to become upset. Judging from his past and present behavior, he is not going to surrender the squirt gun voluntarily.
a.

b.

SCENARIO 2:
Roger has been fooling around instead of working on his seatwork for several days now. Finally, you tell him that he has to finish or stay in during recess and work on it then. He says, "I won't stay in?" and spends the rest of the period sulking. As the class begins to line up for recess, he quickly jumps up and heads for the door. You tell him that he has to stay inside and finish his assignment, but he just says "No I don't" and continues out the door to recess.
a.

b.